An Approach to Jazz Piano

Fifth Edition

Charles Austin

Introduction

This book is an attempt to address the techniques of piano playing as applied to the playing of jazz. It is also an attempt to address theoretical knowledge, and the application of coherent thinking when improvising jazz music. Many aspects of preparation are outlined, including scales, chords, chord symbols, chord/scale relationships, voicings, voice-leading, and the creation of melody.

This volume outlines the materials, theory, basics of melody, and voicing styles which should generate a foundation upon which to build upon any jazz piano/keyboard approach. The material is progressive and is based on the acquisition of the simpler materials to the point where they can be subconsciously recalled. The important area of jazz rhythm is outlined in the rhythm preface regarding the playing of a swing feel that "swings" through note-for-note dynamics. The connections between rhythmic feels are also outlined.

There is no conscious attempt to link the language of jazz to classical thinking and terminology, but there are some connections that are referred to when they can be utilized in the language of jazz. The student approaching this book should have some background in playing the piano. A working knowledge of scales and some classical theory will also be of benefit.

The whole idea of jazz is to play by ear, a skill that should be practised by learning tunes by ear and working them out both harmonically and melodically in keys. The practice of Solfege is helpful in the understanding of the tonal nature of melody. Hearing/playing, hearing/writing (transcribing), and reading/hearing/playing are skills that should be acquired. Pre-hearing and then playing ideas as they are heard is a skill to be practised. Many beginning jazz players play whatever they can rather than working towards a workable musical idea. This book stresses musical thinking habits from the beginning — players are encouraged to work with simple ideas and with repetition, learn how to develop these ideas and build compositionally from there.

I hope this text will help with the organization of material and provide the thoroughness needed to build a comprehensive, engaging, and professional approach to the glorious task at hand. A patient, consistent, balanced approach is the most obvious requirement for success.

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Creating 2, 3, and 4 note motifs and developing them through repetition and variation.

The overriding principle in this exercise is that of staying on the topic. Keep the motif in the ear. Listen, hear, and know what you are going to play. Practise being coherent. Practise repetition and development of motif - learn the scales, and their modes. In a given mode, learn (see figure 18-5) which notes are stable and which notes are less stable, and which notes are "avoid tones." Above all, listen and play what you hear — based on what you know, and treat what you are learning like a language. Any language has purpose, and the acquisition of a musical language is for the purpose of coherent, intelligent, and heartfelt expression. Staying with an idea however humble is generally better than running through a plethora of disjointed licks which can serve no purpose. One must learn to "speak" this music in a coherent manner. Remember your previous idea (or phrase). Try to relate to it coherently in the development of those ideas. It is, no doubt best to approach improvisation with an honest and positive approach. It requires patience and persistence.

figure 18-5

4•1 Through repetition, develop a (2 note) motif through the use of changing rhythms,

Cma7   Ami7   Dmi7   G7
motif   variation   variation   variation
avoid tone adjustment

4•2 Develop a (2 note) motif by linking repetitions of the motif through mostly stepwise motion,

Cma7   Ami7   Dmi7   G7
motif   motif with avoid tone adjustment

4•3 Develop a (2 note) motif by linking repetitions of the motif through mostly leaping motion,

Cma7   Ami7   Dmi7   G7

4•4 Develop a motif by retaining the original (short) melodic shape and play it sequentially in scale steps

Cma7   motif down stepwise   Ami7   Dmi7   G7

4•5 Develop the motif by enlarging or contracting one interval in your original idea.

motif   (augmentation) expansion   expansion   (diminution) contraction
Cma7   Ami7   Dmi7   G7

27 - Secondary Dominants: Conserving the Sense of Key.

1•0 Secondary Domininant 7ths

1•1 Secondary dominants can be used to conserve the sense of the original key.

Secondary dominants operate like any dominant 7th chord and are used to enhance different functional aspects within a given tonality. They are not used as modulations per-se, but function primarily within the given key. Since the roots of secondary dominant chords are based on the actual scale tones of a key, they are strongly related to the key. This relationship to the key is enhanced when applied **secondary dominants scales conserve the original key as closely as possible.** Figure 27-1 features the C major scale with scale-tone 7th chords written on each note of the scale. These scale-tone 7ths and their associated modes in C major (see figure 27-2), **somewhat** resemble the secondary dominants and their associated dominant scales.

figure 27-1   **C major scale and scale-tone 7ths**

figure 27-2   **Scale tone 7ths and associated modes of C major**

1•2 **The only difference between the scale-tone 7ths and the secondary dominants** is a **one-note chromatic alteration** in the secondary dominants. This one-note alteration applies to the difference between the original modes and the secondary dominant scales as well. Secondary dominant chords must have, in their structure, a major 3rd, and a minor 7th interval (from the root). This necessitates the need for one chromatic alteration of the original major scale/chord (see ✱ in figure 27-3), in order to create each secondary dominant scale/chord.

figure 27-3

1•2•1 **Seconday dominants and associated dominant scales**

figure 29-4

FUNCT:	V 7/E	SubV7/E	2ndary Tonic	(or Tonic)
CHORD:	B7(#9#5)	F13	Emi7	(or: E6)
SOURCE:	C melodic minor	C melodic minor	C major	(or E major)
SCALE:	B altered	F lydian b7	E phrygian	(E maj or min)

R.N.A. in key of C:	VII7(#9#5)	IV13	iiimi7	(III6)
SOURCE/CHORD:	Cmel-min/B	C mel-min/F		
R.N.A. of source/chord:	**bII mel-min/I**	**V mel-min/I**		

figure 29-5

E altered: -- source F melodic minor----Bb lydian b7 source: F melodic minor
R.N.A. --------bII mel-min/I-------------------V mel-min/I----------------------
source/chord: F mel-min/E7(#9#5)---------F mel-min/Bb13-----------------

Ami7 is iii of F major, the root of F melodic minor, the source scale of E alt and Bb lyd. b7.

C altered: source: Db melodic minor---Gb lydian b7 source: Db melodic minor
R.N.A. --------bII mel-min/I--------------------V mel-min/I-----------------------
source/chord: Db mel-min/C7(#9#5)-------Db mel-min/Gb13----------------

Fmi7 is iii of Db, the root of Db melodic minor, the source scale of C alt and Gb lyd. b7.

figure 32-3   A proposal of inside-the-key to outside-the-key order of dominant scales for the primary dominant of C: G7

the most inside dominant scale in C major

avoid tones marked ✗

1.

G7 G mixolydian

—G mixolydian is the primary dominant scale and has no notes out of the intended key (C major) (11 is the avoid) source: C major.

2.

G harmonic major dominant

—G har-maj-dominant has one note out of the key. The b9 is a darker, more tense color used in conjunction with a brighter 13. Source: C har-major.

3.

G harmonic major dominant add ♯9

—G har-maj-dom. add #9 has 2 dark extensions on b9 and #9 but still has a relatively brighter 13. Source: C har-maj-add b7.

4.

G lydian ♭7

—G lydian b7 has a one note extension (#11), possibly the brightest and most intense effect. But, 9 and 13 are relatively neutral. Source: D mel-min.

5.

G melodic minor dominant

—G mel-dom. features a dark b13 with a bright 9 (half dark—half light). Source: C mel.

6.

G whole tone

—G whole tone has some intense notes out of the key. b13, is dark #11 is intense. The 9 is bright and in the key.

7.

G harmonic minor dominant

—G har-min-dom. is quite dark, having 2 dark tones out of the key—b9, b13 are dark and tense in combination. Source: C har-min.

8.

G harmonic minor dominant add ♯9

—G har-min-dom. add #9 has basically the same character as har-dom. but with the added tension of #9, making it darker than h.d. source: C har-min-add b7.

9.

G half-whole diminished

—G half-whole diminished. An 8 tone balanced scale: dark with b9, #9 and bright with 13, and intense with #11 (bright-dark).

10.

G altered dominant

—G altered has the most notes away from C major, in the darkest and most compelling dominant scale. Source: Ab mel-min. Note the similarities with h.d(#9) and half-whole dim.

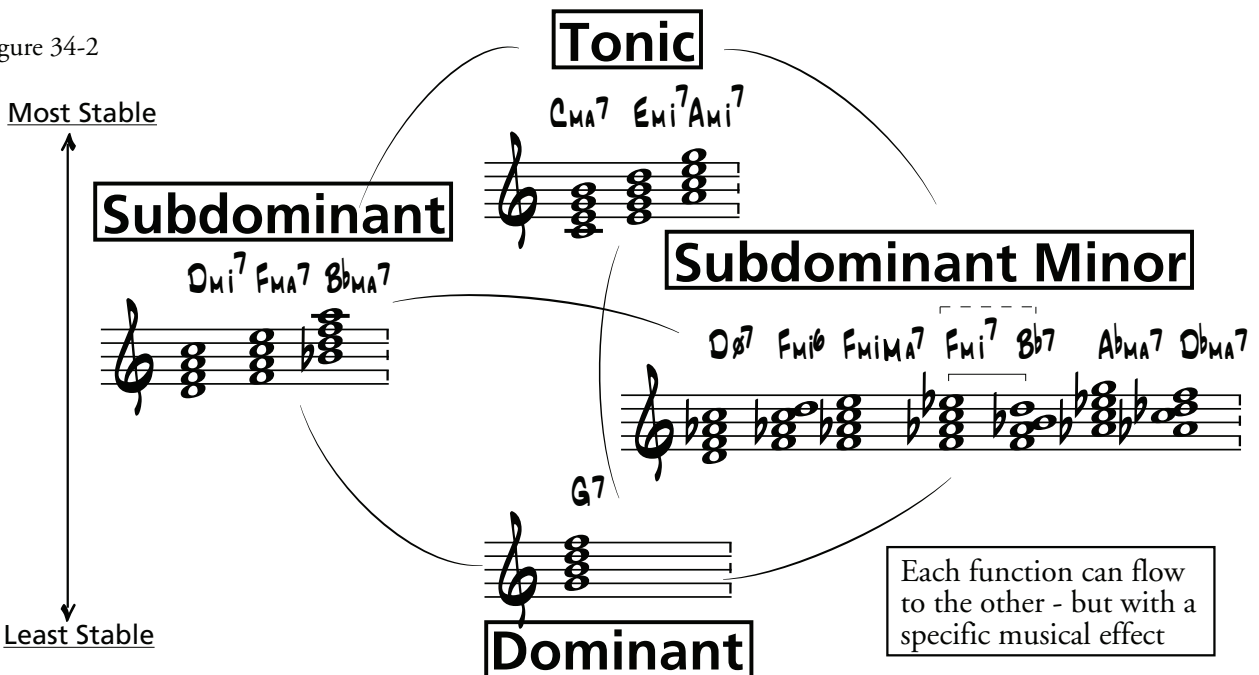The most "outside" dominant scale in C major (on G7)

C dorian / tonic minor: Cmi7, Dmi7, EbMa7, F7, Gmi7, Aø7, [subdom] BbMa7

C phrygian: Cmi7, [s.d.m.] DbMa7, Eb7, Fmi7, Gø7, [s.d.m.] AbMa7, Bbmi7

bVIIMa7 (BbMa7 in C major), is borrowed from C mixolydian. This chord acts like a subdominant chord even though it is out of the original key by one flat: it still has the 4th (F) of the key and except for the root (Bb) it looks very much like a "ii" minor chord (D minor) in the key of C.

3•0 All subdominant minor chords have a bVI of the tonic key in their structure (in the case of C major/minor: "Ab") in each chord.

In subdominant minor chords, the bVI in every subdominant minor (s.d.m.) chord creates a harmonic pull which is greater than subdominant (major) **yet not as strong as the dominant**. Most s.d.m. chords can work as pre-dominant chords, but they are commonly used to proceed to tonic areas. Subdominant minor chords progressing to the tonic can effectively establish the tonic but not to the point of "true" resolution of the tonic. This is generally reserved for the dominant. Figure 34-2 is an update of the illustration of harmonic function found in figure 17-4. This illustration demonstrates the relative stablility/unstability of a given harmonic function i.e. the most stable chord function (the tonic) appears at the top of the graphic and conversely the least stable function (the dominant) appears at the bottom of the graphic. Note the placement of subdominant and subdominant minor: the subdominant (major) appears above the subdominant minor and, subdominant minor appears above the dominant.

figure 34-2

Most Stable

Least Stable

Tonic — CMa7 Emi7 Ami7

Subdominant — Dmi7 FMa7 BbMa7

Subdominant Minor — Dø7 Fmi6 FmiMa7 Fmi7 Bb7 AbMa7 DbMa7

Dominant — G7

Each function can flow to the other - but with a specific musical effect

3•0 The three diminished 7th chord functions:

It is common to think of diminished 7th chords as passing chords or, as associated chords used in dominant 7ths. These uses of diminished 7ths are generally correct, but an examination of the way they are used, will reveal three specific functions. Although they resemble each other in some ways, each individual function has unique applications. The three functions are called:

        3•1 dominant function (leading tone function),
        3•2 passing function,
        3•3 auxiliary function.

3•1 Dominant function of Diminished 7ths.

Because the diminished 7th chord can be built on the 3rd of a dominant 7th chord to form a 7(b9) chord, it can operate like a dominant 7th on its own. This is due to the powerful symmetry and pulling tendencies of the diminished 7th chord (note the two tritone intervals in the diminished 7th chord). Figure 36-2 illustrates Edim7 and then Edim7/C = C7(b9)

figure 36-2

Diminished 7ths functioning in this way are generally used as secondary dominants (see chapters 26—32). The dim7 chord is built on the leading tone of the intended destination chord. In figure 36-3 the example in C major illustrates the passage from tonic (C6) to subdominant (Dmi7) through a C#dim7 chord. C# is the leading tone of D (minor). Here C#dim7 acts as an A7(b9), the dominant of Dmi (Dmi7). C#dim/A = A7(b9) which is a secondary dominant in C major.

figure 36-3

C# is the leading tone to Dmi
C# is the third of A7 (the V7 of Dmi)

43 - Slash-Chords: Chord Forms Over Bass Notes, Creating Chord Quality

They are called "slash-chords" because of the slanted line (the slash) between the chord symbol and the bass note (root). The slash indicates that the chord is **over** the bass note (usually the root). Slash-chords generally have a particular voicing effect which creates an open sound. They have a multiplicity of uses, from soft ballads to loud rock-style sounds. The open nature of this voicing, can create extensions of a chord yet will often omit some of the fundamental voices of a chord, resulting in a vague haunting sound that may only imply chord quality. Many of these voicings are related to the pluralities outlined in chapter 42. Slash-chords often result in a thinner chord texture but are generally very efficient in terms of implying a harmonic definition and direction. The voicings are outlined in figure 43-1:

1•0   with all major triad/bass note combinantions
2•0   with all minor triad/bass note combinantions
3•0   with all augmented and diminished triad/bass note combinantions
4•0   with common 7th chord/bass note combinations
5•0   slash chords under a melody

figure 43-1

1•0 All major triad/bass-note combinations with functional descriptions for each slash-chord.

	Ab/G	A/G	Bb/G	B/G	C/G	Db/G
implied har-mony:	G phrygian. G7 Har-min-dom. G Har-min-dom-#9.	G lydian. G lydian b7 A7/G	Gmi7. G dor. G aeol. G phry.	GMa7(#5) G Har-maj. III of E har-min.	2nd inversion C major (sub-dominant in G)	implies G loc. also G7(b9#11) uses dim 1/2-whole and/or G alt.

	D/G	Eb/G	E/G	F/G	Gb/G
	GMa9 major, lydian, also could be minor (GmiMa9)	passing chord in G alt-dom.	implies G13(b9) dominant	G9sus4 mixo. implies Gmi9	GdimMa7 (dim function) implies Eb7(#9)

44 - The "Sound": A Slash-Chord Approach to Jazz Piano Voicing

These voicings are a series of complex 7th chords used in various ways to create many of the same left-hand rootless voicings using 7/3 with extensions (9 & 13) illustrated in chapters 20 and 21. As a slash-chord, the "sound" most used is the Ma7(b5) chord, called a stock 13. Most complex 7ths can be used as slash-chords to produce a number of extended chord qualities. The **"sounds"** under discussion are designated with acronyms (S1—PS1—PPS1, and S2—PS2—PPS2), using a system which attempts to describe ii—V—I and the application of the **bebop cliché** (figure 36-20).

1•0 **Ma7(b5)**—(Sound 1 [**S1**])—(**PS1** is a **Ma7** chord),
2•0 **miMa7(b5)** [dimMa7]—(Sound 2 [**S2**]),
3•0 **Ma7(#5)**—(Pre-Pre-Sound 1[**PPS1**]),
4•0 **miMa7**—(Pre-Sound 2 [**PS2**]),
5•0 **miMa7(#5)**—(Pre-Pre-Sound 2 [**PPS2**]),
6•0 **7(b5)**, **7(#5)** and **mi7(b5)**,
7•0 **V/I**: the "New Sound" (**NS**)—G/C (**G2nd inv/C**).

> The attempt here is to create a "short-hand" method of describing slash-chords in a ii—V—I which includes the bebop cliché.

1•0 Ma7(b5)—(sound 1 [S1]) Sound 1(S1) slash chords are illustrated in figure 44-1.

figure 44-1

1•1 Sound one Ma7(b5) [FMa7(b5) used in this example] as a slash-chord creates these 4 qualities:

	G13	Db7(#9#5)	Dmi6/9	Bmi11(b5)
chord quality				
slash chord	FMa7(b5)/G	FMa7(b5)/Db	FMa7(b5)/D	FMa7(b5)/B
Roman Numeral Analysis	bVIIMa7(b5)/I	III(S1)/I	bIII(S1)/I	bV(S1)/I
most common harmonic function	dominant V7 (V13)	altered dominant V7(#9#5)	tonic minor Imi6/9	sub-dom-mi (ii) iimi11(b5)

Clarification of 1•1 in figure 41-1:

G13, Db7(#9#5), and Dmi6/9 are essentially the same voicings discussed in chapter 20 and 21, Bmi11(b5) as shown, has no minor 3rd, but it is implied by the existence of the 11th in the same chord since the 11th cannot (generally) co-exist with a major 3rd in the same chord. The 11th **can** co-exist with a minor 3rd (see 2•3 in Chapter 20).

Practise these voicings through chromatic sequences and inversions. Some typical progressions can be played by using (S1) [Ma7(b5)] alone. Figure 44-2 illustrates some of the possibilities.

The benign nature of the pentatonic scale allows for the application of certain slash-chord roots and resultant chord qualities for use in all harmonic functions. There are at least 5 qualities created with the pentatonic scale over a root. Other qualities can use the sound and shape of certain pentatonic chord/scales without interfering with that chord's quality and function. Figure 45-3 illustrates pentatonic slash-chord qualities and figure 45-4 illustrates associated pentatonics as slash chords over the remaining chord types.

figure 45-3

These 5 roots (C, A, D, F, and Bb) create slash-chord qualities from any rotation or any voicing of the C pentatonic scale. Since these voicings contain the same notes, anyone of them can function as the upper component over these slash-chord roots.

figure 45-4

1•2 **All qualities of 7th chords can be converted into Drop 2** (and Drop 3, and Drop 2&4).

Figure 46-3 is a repeat of figure 15-1 which lists the most commonly used closed voiced 7ths chords. Included in figure 46-3 is a root-position-conversion of each closed voiced 7th chord into a Drop 2 voicing. When learning Drop 2 voicings it is best to start with the first 6 or 7 basic qualities (Ma7, 7, mi7 [Ma6], mi7(b5) [mi6], dim7, 7(#5), 7sus 4).

figure 46-3   **Commonly used 7th chords**

Commonly used 7th chords as Drop 2's

1•3 **Avoiding the minor 9th clash in 1st inversion Ma7 chords.**

A minor 9th clash is created when the root of the Drop 2 is in the top voice and the Major 7th is in the bottom voice (as in a 1st inversion Ma7 chord). This is true no matter what kind of 3rd or 5th the chord has—the potential clash is between the root and the major 7th.

There are a couple of ways to diffuse this: (see figure 46-4)

    1•3•1 replace the root in the melody for the 9th (9 for 1),
    1•3•2 replace the Major 7th with the 6th (6 for 7).

figure 46-4

3•0 Comping offsets phrasing and interacts with melodic rhythm.

Note the abbreviations found in figure 47-4:

      3•1 at the beginning of a phrase (BP),
      3•2 at the end of a phrase (EP),
      3•3 and in the middle of a phrase (MP).

Figure 47-4 provides a small example of each of the above points.

figure 47-4

(changes) **Ready For Another Step** (excerpt)

4•0 Comping can help to generate harmonic color and harmonic rhythm:

    4•1 harmonic color—upper extensions add color and color/intensity direction (figure 47-5).
    4•2 harmonic rhythm (harmonic rate can be changed from 1 change per bar to 2, 3, or 4
        changes to the bar (see figure 47-6).

figure 47-5

figure 47-6

2•0 Phrasing using a polarized passing-tone scale: starting on the beat — starting off the beat. Figure 50-3 illustrates.

2•1 The polarized passing-tone scale can be a useful tool for establishing chord tones in a scale-like melodic line. In 4/4 time these scales will play the chord-tones on the beat if the scale/line begins on a chord tone on the beat.

2•2 The off-beat notes in the scalar line will be non-chord-tones and in fact will be the notes of the polar opposite of the chord of the moment. Since any chord of the moment will be spelled out if a scale-like phrase starts **on the beat with any chord-tone,** the same is true if the line starts **on the off-beat with a non-chord tone** (any note of the chord-of-opposite-polarity).

2•3 Other adjacent chromatic tones may be added to the polarized scales as long as the line comes back to chord tones on the beat—non-chord-tones on the off-beat before the phrase ends.

figure 50-3

2•1 **Chord tones on the beat** in a polarized scale. Note the leaps from chord tone to chord tone. As long as chord-tones are on the beat and non-chord-tones (or polar-chord tones) are on the off-beat, the integrity of the statement in 2•1 holds true.

2•2 The **off-beat notes** in a scalar line will be the **notes of the polar opposite of the chord/scale**. This means that if this idea is maintained, phrases that start on the off-beat should start on polar-chord-tones (the dominant component of a polarized scale).